

# The Builder.

No. CLXII.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 10, 1846.



OUR readers are aware that the Act prescribes that stone stairs, when used internally in dwelling-houses, must be wholly supported by "fire-proof constructions, and must be connected internally by landings, the floors of which are fire-proof and wholly upborne and supported by fire-proof constructions, and must be connected with the exterior entrance by passages, the floors of which are fire-proof and wholly borne up and supported by fire-proof constructions."

Mr. Taylor, of Pinlirc, a mason, had prepared and partly fixed, in ignorance of this regulation, a stone staircase, whereof the steps were wholly supported by fire-proof constructions, but which had landings and passages formed in the ordinary manner, with fir joists and deal boarding. The district-surveyor rightly considered himself bound to require that these latter should be fire-proof also; and as no preparation for this had been made, the case was submitted to the referees. Their award was:—

"That it will be contrary to the Metropolitan Buildings Act to make the floor of the passage intended to connect any stone stairs in a dwelling-house with the exterior entrance thereof, or the landings by which such stone stairs are to be connected in the several stories, in such manner that they will not be fire-proof, and, as well as the stairs, wholly upborne and supported by fire-proof constructions; and, in compliance with the request of the surveyor of the district, we, the said official referees, do hereby direct that, in the present case, the passage from the entrance-door to the foot of the stairs, which have been already fixed, be rendered fire-proof; which may be done by means of a sufficient cast-iron girder from the front wall, to and over the cross wall, or to and upon a sufficient pier of brickwork, or an iron column, at or near to the foot of the basement stairs, and so disposed that the end of the curtail step of the flight from the ground floor story may rest upon it; such cast-iron girder being laid at or within the line of the passage-partition, so as to assist the party-wall in carrying such requisite fire-proof floor: but inasmuch as the said James Taylor has incurred the expense of providing, preparing, and partly fixing a stone staircase, without providing the means of forming properly supported landings to connect the stairs between the several stories, and such proceeding having been taken in ignorance of the intention and effect of the statute, and having especial regard to the size of the house in which the said stairs are to be used, we, the said official referees, are of opinion that the surveyor of the district will be justified in permitting the upper landings to be executed as proposed."

Some time ago, when a statement of a similar, if not the same case, was laid before us, we said the regulation in question, which permits a builder to make his stairs, landings, and approaches wholly combustible, but will not allow him to render them in part fire-proof, was anomalous.

That the same opinion is entertained generally, seems to be evidenced by the fact, that the referees have commenced the above award by stating, it appears to them, "that the intention of the rule quoted in the said requisition is, that when stairs in dwelling-houses are of stone, or other incombustible substance, there shall be the reality, as well as the appearance, of secure means of escape from such dwelling-houses in the event of fire, by requiring the landings connecting the several flights of stairs in the several stories of a building, and the floor of the passage connecting the stairs with the exterior entrance of any such building to be fire-proof, and, as well as the stairs, to be upborne and supported by fire-proof constructions trustworthy in the event of such calamity; and having regard to the consideration, that people are not liable to be deceived by wooden staircases, but that they are liable to be deceived by the appearance which stone stairs present, when these are not properly upborne and supported, and are not properly connected throughout, and with an exterior entrance by like sufficient, and secure constructions," they awarded as before recited.

There is no doubt that this is the motive of the clause; we cannot, however, consider it a sufficient one, and trust the regulation will not be allowed to escape revision. It cannot be denied, that fire-proof landings and accesses to stairs are very desirable, and if the provision referred to were likely to lead to the more constant introduction of such, the objection to it would be weaker. We feel satisfied, however, that this will not be the case, but that it will lead to the disuse of stone stairs altogether, excepting in large and costly houses, where the regulation would generally have been complied with if it had not existed. Stone stairs are now often put up in houses of middling size, wholly upborne by fire-proof constructions, and useful so far as they go, in more ways than one. But in few cases are the accesses and landings so also, as a different arrangement is required in order to effect this, and great additional expense must be incurred.

Surely, 't is better that there should be partial means of getting safely down a building on fire than that there should be none. And there is further this most important consideration, that wooden stairs materially aid in communicating fire from one floor to another. As to the notion that persons "are liable to be deceived by the appearance which stone stairs present," and so are led to make no other provision for escape, this really goes for nothing, since it is well known that nine hundred and ninety-nine persons out of every thousand, whether with wooden or stone stairs in their houses, never make any previous arrangement at all for escape, or give the matter a thought until it be too late.

Houses commenced before January 1st, 1846, at present unfinished.

THE following is a copy of the circular to which we referred in our last, addressed by the registrar to the district surveyors, on the 1st of the present month:—

"With respect to buildings commenced before the 1st January, 1846, and remaining incomplete on this day, the 1st January, 1846, I beg on the part of the official referees and myself, with a view to relieve, in some degree, the doubts and apprehensions of persons interested in building, as to the application of the Metropolitan Buildings Act to such buildings, to inform you, in common with the other district surveyors, that the official referees are of opinion,—

1st. That if such buildings (whether within the limits of the former Building Act, 14 Geo. III. c. 78, or the new districts created by

the present Metropolitan Buildings Act) be structurally complete, that is to say (in the language of the 77th section), if the roof be covered in, and all the walls be built to their full heights, and the principal timbers and floors fixed in their places, you will be justified in considering that the Metropolitan Buildings Act will not extend to the original erection and completion of such buildings.

2ndly. That if the structure of any such building within the limits of the former Building Act, 14 Geo. III. c. 78, have been executed in compliance with that Act, then you will be justified in considering that so much of any such structure as may be already executed will not be affected by the Metropolitan Buildings Act, but that whatever may remain to be done in or to such buildings on this day (so far as it can be done without demolishing any part of the structure), should be done in compliance with the rules, provisions, and directions of the Metropolitan Buildings Act. But,—

3rdly. As it regards such buildings within the metropolitan district in those parts which were not within the operation of the Act 14 Geo. III., the official referees feel that they can suggest no general rule applicable to such buildings, but that every case must necessarily rest upon its own merits."

## CONSTRUCTION OF TERMS STREET AND ALLEY.

A correspondent writes: "In THE BUILDER of the 27th instant (page 618, Vol. III.), 'Construction of the terms, street and alley,' it is reported, that the referees decided, that the houses could not be built unless a road forming the approach, be at the same time made of the statutory width.

This award certainly does not set at rest the question, whether a street must have two entrances, because, had the referees intended to have put this construction on the Act, they would most assuredly have said roads."

With reference to this point, we may state, that the referees have decided by another award, that the Act does not require two entrances for a street, although it does for an alley. The case briefly was this. Mr. Scarth desired to build some houses on a piece of land adjoining the vicarage garden at Fulham, and proposed to form a road in front of them. 24 feet wide, from the wall of the vicar's garden, with one entrance only, of the same width.

The referees determined, "that inasmuch as the buildings in question are to be built at a greater distance than 20 feet from the boundary of land belonging to the owner of such buildings, and in the same occupation therewith; and there are no buildings within a distance of 20 feet from such boundary, on the other side of such boundary, it will not be contrary to the said Act to build the houses in question in the situations shewn."

A title-page, in colours, has been printed for the volume lately completed, and may be obtained, on application at the office, by those subscribers who may prefer it to the plain title-page, distributed last week with the index.

## NEW WORKS AT THE POST OFFICE.

In order to obtain additional accommodation at the Post-office, St. Martin's-le-Grand, two new rooms, of large size, have been formed for letter-sorters over a part of the present building, under the direction of Mr. Sydney Smirke. As the span is considerable, and it was desired to occupy as little space with the floor as possible, a series of iron arches has been introduced, to support at the same time the roof and (by means of suspending rods) the timbers of the floor. The construction being novel and ingenious, we shall shortly illustrate it in detail.